

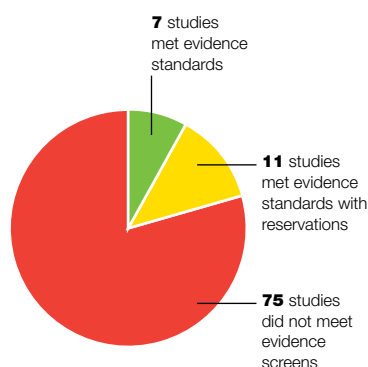
What Works Clearinghouse



Character Education

June 4, 2007

WWC identified 93 studies of 41 programs



Character education is a fairly new and rapidly evolving topic for curriculum interventions. It is also broad, often overlapping with other program areas.

Character can encompass such moral and ethical values as respect, fairness, and caring—as well as responsibility, trustworthiness, and citizenship. And it can refer to the demonstration of these values in behavior, reasoning, and emotions.

Some character education programs integrate activities in social studies, English, and math. Some create communities of students, teachers, and parents to foster respect and caring. And some use in-class stories, games, songs, and activity books to encourage the acceptance of other cultures.

To set some bounds on this evolving topic, the WWC identified programs that deliberately attempt to develop students' character by teaching core values and that had most if not all of their lesson plans or prescribed activities directly related to instilling those values. Most programs did not enter our review because of this criterion. For programs that did, most had only one or two small studies that met our evidence standards. For these studies, student outcomes were measured in three domains: behavior, academic achievement, and knowledge, attitudes, and values.

We looked at 93 studies of 41 programs that qualified for our review. Of these, 18 studies of 13 programs met our evidence standards, 7 without reservations, and 11 with reservations. (The identification of eligible programs ended in September 2005, and that of eligible studies, in July 2006.)

This review summarizes the first wave of intervention reports produced in 2005–06.
www.whatworks.ed.gov

In looking at the three outcome domains for the 13 programs:

- *Positive Action* had positive effects on behavior and on academic achievement
- *Too Good for Drugs and Violence* had positive effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values
- *Too Good for Violence* had potentially positive effects on behavior and on knowledge, attitudes, and values

Six other programs had potentially positive effects in one domain. Five had no discernible effects in any domain.

Character education in practice

Setting schoolwide principles. The School Improvement Committee at Davis elementary, comprising the parents, teachers, administrators, and the school principal, supervises practices that promote the school's values—such as cultural awareness and interpersonal respect. Ms. Lopez, a fourth grade teacher, helps her class reflect on their decisionmaking and behavior, drawing on students' personal experiences. After each lesson, the class agrees on rules of respectful and culturally sensitive behavior. Throughout the year, the students deepen their understanding of these concepts through class discussion, art projects, and schoolwide events.

Character education in practice

Integration into the curriculum. Teachers at Oaks high school work to infuse moral problem-solving and ethical thinking into the curriculum. In history and social studies, students explore the ethical values found in the Declaration of Independence. In language arts, students write essays that focus on moral dilemmas. In math, students learn how to interpret statistical results from a survey about moral attitudes. In additional small-group discussions, facilitated by trained teachers and senior students, students talk about dilemmas in their personal life and how to resolve them.

Intervention Ratings for Character Education

Each character education program that had at least one study meeting WWC standards (with or without reservations) received a rating of effectiveness in at least one outcome domain: behavior, knowledge, attitudes, and values, and academic achievement. The rating aims to characterize the existing evidence in a given domain, taking into account the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, the size of the difference between participants in the

intervention and comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies.

The research evidence can be rated as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)). Table 1 shows the effectiveness ratings for the 13 programs in the three domains (empty cells indicate that no evidence was reported).

Table 1 Effectiveness ratings for 13 programs in three domains

| Intervention | Behavior | Knowledge, attitudes, values | Academic achievement |
|--|----------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Building Decision Skills (http://www.globalethics.org/services/edu/bds.htm) | | + | |
| Caring School Community™ (http://www.devstu.org) | + | ? | ? |
| Connect with Kids (http://connectwithkids.com/) | + | | |
| Facing History and Ourselves (http://www.facinghistory.org/) | ? | ? | |
| Heartwood Ethics Curriculum (http://www.heartwoodethics.org/) | ? | ? | |
| Lessons in Character (http://www.youngpeoplespress.com/) | ? | ? | + |
| Positive Action (http://www.positiveaction.net/google/character_education/) | + | | + |
| Skills for Action (http://www.lions-quest.org/) | | ? | |
| Skills for Adolescence (http://www.lions-quest.org/) | + | | |
| Too Good for Drugs™ (http://www.mendezfoundation.org) | + | ? | |
| Too Good for Drugs and Violence (http://www.mendezfoundation.org) | | + | |
| Too Good for Violence (http://www.mendezfoundation.org) | + | + | |
| Voices Literature and Character Education (http://www.zaner-bloser.com/) | | ? | |

Note: Two programs had research findings in all three domains; five programs had research findings in two domains; and six programs had research findings in one domain. WWC intervention reports describe each program and provide information on the students, the cost, and the scope of use. To view the intervention reports please click on the program name or go to www.whatworks.ed.gov. Following each program name is the developer's website address. The research evaluated addresses some but not all grade levels targeted by these interventions. Grade levels are related to student age and may affect outcomes. For a comparison of targeted grade levels and grade levels in the studies reviewed by the WWC see Appendix A2. The rating for *Building Decision Skills* pertains to *Building Decision Skills* combined with *Service Learning*.

Key

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|---|
|  | Positive effects: strong evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence |  | Potentially positive effects: evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence |  | Mixed effects: evidence of inconsistent effects |  | No discernible effects: no affirmative evidence of effects |  | Potentially negative effects: evidence of a negative effect with no overriding contrary evidence |  | Negative effects: strong evidence of a negative effect with no overriding contrary evidence |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|---|

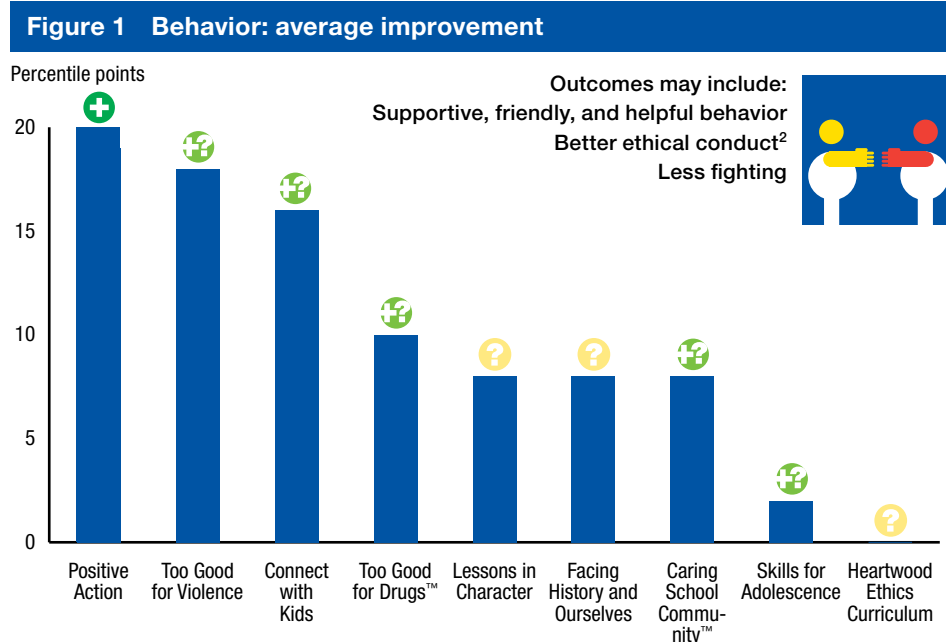
Average improvement indices for each domain

The WWC computes an average improvement index for each domain and each study as well as a domain average improvement index across studies of the same intervention (see the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)).

The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition and the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. It can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, which is based on four factors, the improvement index is based only on the size of the difference between the intervention and the comparison conditions.¹

Behavior

The behavior domain includes observed or reported student behavior outcomes that may be regarded as indicators of socially responsible character (such as participating in community service and supporting peers) or of the lack of it (such



1. To enable comparisons across interventions, improvement indices are calculated from student-level findings only. In the case of Positive Action findings in the behavior and academic achievement domains and in the case of Caring School Community findings in the knowledge, attitudes, and values domain, the average improvement index does not represent all the findings reviewed by the WWC, as some findings were reported on the classroom or school level, and student-level improvement indices could not be computed. For further details please see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#).

2. Ethical conduct includes honest, fair, rule-abiding, and respectful behavior toward children and adults during cooperative and competitive activities.

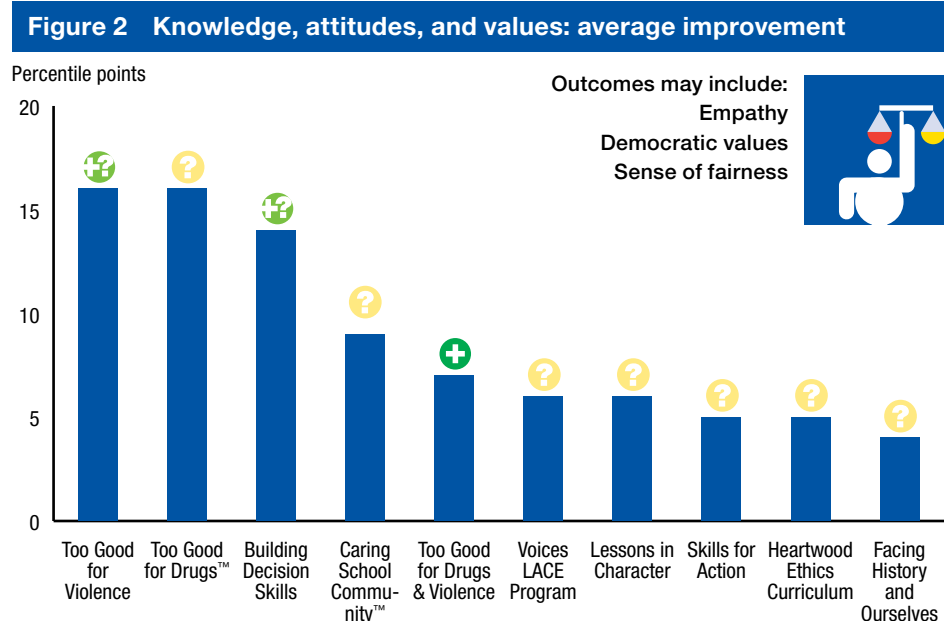
as aggressive or delinquent behavior). We reviewed outcomes in this domain for nine character education programs, and the average improvement index ranged from +0 to +19 percentile points (figure 1).

Knowledge, attitudes, and values

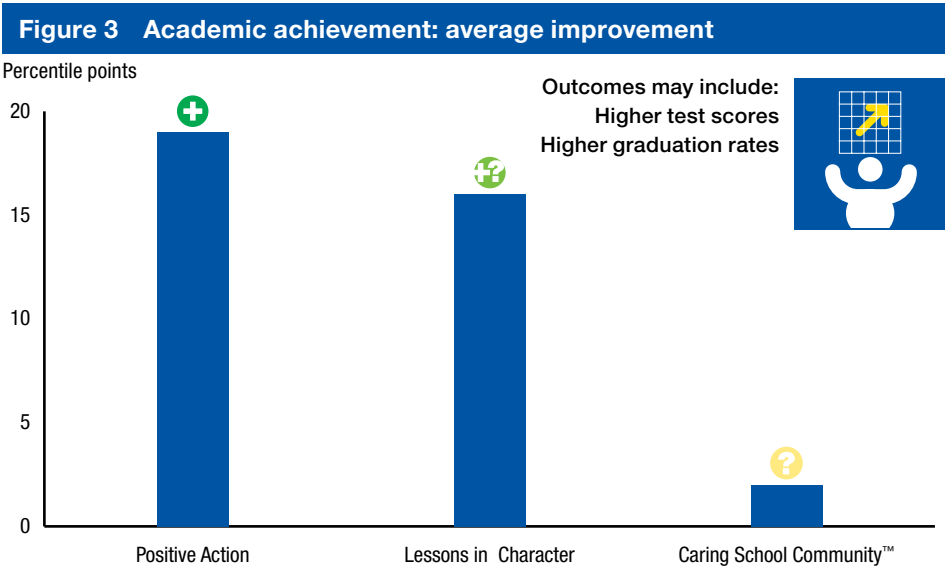
The knowledge, attitudes, and values domain includes student outcomes that center on moral and ethical reasoning, as well as attitudes, feelings, predispositions, and self-perceptions that are associated with pro-social character (such as democratic values and empathy) or the lack of it (such as racism, positive attitudes toward aggression). We reviewed outcomes in this domain for 10 character education programs, and the average improvement index ranged from +0 to +16 percentile points across programs (figure 2).

Academic achievement

The academic achievement domain includes measures of academic achievement (such as standardized test scores) and measures of academic persistence or



participation (such as attendance, retention, and graduation rates). We reviewed outcomes in this domain for three programs, and the average improvement index ranged from +0 to +16 percentile points (figure 3).



Character education in practice

Role models and service learning. The character education program at Lowell high school combines in-class activities with service learning. This year, the ninth-graders decided to contribute to the appearance of their downtown area. The students researched the type of plants most appropriate for this area, prepared a budget, and presented an action plan to the city council, which approved the plan. With the help of teachers and parents, they raised the money for the equipment and supplies. The students wrote about their experiences in language arts classes and discussed the moral and ethical values that they felt they developed through the service learning. Towards the end of the semester, the school principal met with student representatives to listen to their feedback about the character education and service learning efforts in the school.

Character education in practice

A comprehensive focus on caring. In Jefferson middle school, teachers and school administrators model caring behavior during class hours and school breaks and acknowledge students' acts of kindness. Parents receive the school newsletter, which shares what the school does to promote a caring school community and invites families to take part in the school's projects and special events. Teachers' assessments of students' caring behavior is included in report cards. A school climate survey, administered to students as part of the school's self-assessment, has a scale on whether students experience faculty and their fellow students as being caring.

Note: The character education practices present hypothetical scenarios based on elements recommended by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools and the Character Education Partnership.

Table 2 Programs reviewed with no studies meeting WWC evidence screens

| | |
|---|--|
| A Celebration of Character (http://www.kkconsult.com/celebration.htm) | Living Values: Educational Program (http://www.livingvalues.net/) |
| AEGIS (<i>Acquiring Ethical Guidelines for Individual Self-governance</i> ; http://www.aegis-character.com/) | Love in a Big World (http://www.loveinabigworld.org/) |
| Building Esteem in Students Today (BEST) (<i>no website available</i>) | Making Meaning (http://www.devstu.org/) |
| The Caring Habits Experience (http://www.jeffersoncenter.org/index.html) | Open Circle (http://www.open-circle.org/main.asp?areaid=0) |
| Changing Lives (http://www.mark1.org/changinglives/) | Pathways to Character (http://www.epicforchildren.org/) |
| Character Building & Reading Mastery (http://www.kkconsult.com/readitheedit.htm) | Peace Education (http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/peace/index.asp) |
| Character Counts! (http://www.charactercounts.org/) | Project Wisdom (http://www.projectwisdom.com/) |
| Character First! (www.characterfirst.com) | Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program (http://www.esmational.org) |
| CHARACTERplus (http://characterplus.org/) | Skills for Growing (http://www.lions-quest.org/) |
| Community of Caring (http://communityofcaring.org/AboutCofC/overview.html) | Smart and Good (http://www.cortland.edu/character/highschool/) |
| ESSENTIAL Curriculum/ Project Essential (http://www.teelinstitute.org/home.htm) | Success through Accepting Responsibility (S.T.A.R.; http://www.jeffersoncenter.org/jcenter/STAR.htm) |
| The Giraffe Heroes Program (http://www.giraffe.org/) | Tribes TLC® (http://www.tribes.com/) |
| “I Care” Parental Involvement Character Curriculum (http://www.icarenow.com/) | Wisdom for Life (http://www.livewiremedia.com/wisdom.html) |
| Learning for Life (http://www.learningforlife.org/lfl/) | WiseSkills® (http://www.wiseskills.com/) |

Note: Following each program name is the developer’s website address.

For more information about studies reviewed and WWC methodology, please see the [WWC Character Education Technical Appendices](#).